



## SCIENTIFIC COMMUNICATION

## The spaces and places of Czech believers

Gustav NOVOTNÝ<sup>a †</sup>**Abstract**

*Geographical aspects of contemporary Czech religiosity are discussed in this paper. The main objective is to understand and approximate the spaces and places of faith which Czech believers inhabit, construct and reconstruct. An original focus on young believers was broadened to include priests, preachers and older members of several churches in Brno city, and the Přerov and Ústí nad Labem regions. Concepts of space and place, sacred spaces, and the imagery of post-mortem spaces are treated within the context of so-called secularisation and related phenomena. The methodology is based on an inductive qualitative approach using the Grounded Theory of Strauss and Corbin. The data are presented, discussed and ordered following the main themes originating from the research, including: (i) spaces of regular activities (related to the faith); (ii) spaces of dissemination and evangelisation of the faith; (iii) personal places linked with faith; and (iv) an introduction to the imagery of post-mortem spaces. The results document a long-term shift in the attitudes of believers, the change from rather public spaces of community gathering to personal places, influenced by specific secularisation tendencies. Also, the results represent the typical places of faith which are constructed and reconstructed by current Czech believers, and the current imagery of post-mortem spaces.*

**Keywords:** *religiosity, space, place, secularisation, post-mortem spaces, Czech Republic*

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**1. Introduction**

This study examines the “spaces and places of the faith” and the phenomenon of secularisation, which serves as a guiding theme in this text, and presents several aspects of research on Czech religiosity. The thematic topic of secularisation underlies and to some extent accounts for the shift in using and perceiving spaces and places by Czech believers.

The “space(s)” and “place(s)” are extremely geographical terms, which have been dealt with for a long time by geographers, especially in the period of Humanist Geography and later by many other authors (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977, 1978; Seamon, 1979, 1980; DeCerteau, 1984; Vávra, 2010; Hynek, 2011; Siwek, 2011). This contribution also develops the concept of the “sacred place”, which lies at the intersection of the geography of religion and geographical interest in spaces and places (Park, 1994; Smith, 2008; Šiler, 2017; Crosbie et al., 2018). A further revealed aim was to connect these thematic levels with the geographical study of the imagination of post-mortem spaces and the afterlife.

A major objective of this research was to deepen our understanding of the spatial imagery (as constructed and used by participants, i.e. not their ‘imaginaries’ nor ‘imagination’ as commonly used in the geographic literature), of the practices of Czech believers, mainly Christians. More precisely, the goal is to orient our work to their “spaces and places of the faith”, which are related in their everydayness but also in their exceptionality.

The spaces are created and re-created directly by the believers – places are then more specific, often static, more personal, and connected with geographies of the body and personal experiences. Some potentially fruitful findings emerged from the inductive qualitative research on the “imagined places”: first, there are remote places, whether to pilgrimages or from personal experiences, to which the believers like to return in person or, due to physical distance, rather in their thoughts; second, the post-mortem places, which are imagined in a specific manner, in (dis)agreement with the particular Church dogma. Members of an “alternative religiosity” formed a secondary group, which was explored extensively for comparison with Czech

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Christians: the term is relatively ambiguous and includes colourful and variable scales of religious and quasi-religious attitudes: a) new religions – “new” in the Czech context; b) personal non-institutionalised spirituality, grouped under the notion of “alternative religiosity”.

A secondary objective was to demonstrate that secularisation is related to processes of the shift in geographical spaces and places which are utilised by Czech believers over time. In the frame of a gradual exploration of the phenomena using the methodological design of Grounded Theory, this is the very theory which arose from the inquiry. A geography of spaces and places of the faith then becomes a specific time-space. Other (more general) goals consisted of an explication of the personal places of Czech believers, and an understanding of the imagery of post-mortem spaces and their geographical dimensions.

The research aims were fully specified in the use of a qualitative methodology (see details in the Methodology section), by semi-structured interviews and through analysis according to the procedures of Grounded Theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), and with the use of complementary methodological sources (Cloke et al., 2004; Disman, 2008; Hendl, 2005; Švaříček and Šedřová, 2007). Some authors have directly “challenged” researchers to a stronger shift to qualitative methods in inquiries about religiosity: Tichý and Vávra (2012, p. 7); Lužný and Nešpor (2008, p. 9); Bartolini et al. (2017).

## 2. Theoretical background: Spaces and places of faith

The theory is concerned with places, spaces and spatiality itself. Subsequently, I focus on the meaning of place from the point of view of selected authors (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977, 1978; DeCerteau, 1984; Vávra, 2010; Hynek, 2011; Siwek, 2011) to form a basis for the study of which spaces/places are important for believers, both individuals and communities. Brace et al. (2006) have also investigated communal identities in specific places around a sense of religious belonging. The following section is dedicated to the theme of “sacral places”, focusing on how this issue can be utilised for the current research problem: how the spaces and places of Czech believers can be studied and how to approximate the processes involved in how spaces/places are constructed and reconstructed. These sacred places include places connected with the established Church (e.g. pilgrimage places), but also the personal places of each believer (Relph, 1976; Park, 1994). I also deal with the issue of post-mortem and other ‘abstract faith’ spaces, with an emphasis on “transcendent” places of the transition between two worlds: post-mortem imagined spaces or those related to afterlife practices.

### 2.1 Space and its interpretation

According to Siwek (2011, p. 32), humans do not perceive a void but the space via the objects and places, and uniquely with the help of those, evaluate also the characteristics of the space or its parts (relative space, in this case). Nigel Thrift (2003) divides the concepts of space into four parts:

- empirical space (empirical constructions);
- unblocking space (based on interactions);
- image space (approximately equal to imagery in this paper); and
- space connected with place (“place space”).

The latter is understood as a place; but ‘understood’ is used only loosely since the nature of place is anything but fully understood (Thrift, 2003, p. 102). Place is more ‘real’ than space, a stance born out of the intellectual certainties of humanism and the idea that certain spaces are somehow more ‘human’ than others – these are the places where bodies can more easily live out (or at least approximate) a particular Western idea of what a human being should be in their being (Thrift, 2003, p. 102).

Castree and Gregory (2006) discuss the attitude of David Harvey, who emphasised the importance of public space and the seeking of space in its “spatialities” when creating any geographical imagery; moreover, he perceives the complexity of space as fortunate for research. According to Siwek (2011, p. 41), the most geographical feature is that space can be understood in various ways, whose combinations allow new views on “what is where” or “where” something happens. “Space” is often considered as a notion equal to “milieu” or “settings” by contemporary geographers, and for many it is a complex of variable views forming a “synergy”. For others, it is equal to geometrical space or to the aggregate of spatial relations (Siwek, 2011, p. 41); but see also Thrift (2003, p. 102) who claims places are inseparable parts of the interactions in the real world.

### 2.2 Space as the net of lived places and the meaning of place

The trialectics of space (absolute – relative – relational), as described for example by Lefebvre (1991) or Hynek (2011) and then problematised by Gibas (2014), offer thinking on our world and explain that people do not inhabit abstract spaces, they do not live in space but they inhabit places (Gibas, 2014, p. 235). Tuan (1977, p. 3) says space means freedom while place is safety. The first tempts us, the second binds us. Although radically different, the “imagery of space and place need each other to be self-defined”. From the safety and stability of place we are conscious of the openness, freedom and thread of space, and vice versa. For Tuan (1977), space represents freedom, which enables the rise/creation of places or more generally the opportunities which are accomplished through the places. Space is given to us through the places (or technically – objects), whether real or imagined, and its relative position, its relations. Space is defined as a net of places (Tuan, 1977, p. 12). Space without places would be just a non-practised and maybe frightening or even unreal possibility (Gibas, 2014, p. 235).

The final kind of space (according to Thrift, 2003) is space understood as place. Through the body, humans inhabit the world, through activities which are transformed into behaviour by human subjects. Sets of integrated behaviours which provide certain aims are called time-space routines or body ballet (Seamon, 1979). People entangled in time-space routines meet in time and space, they are going to know each other, starting to speak. Thanks to these interpersonal dynamics, which are considered taken-for-granted, space becomes place where humans maintain and create their own little parts (Seamon, 1979).

According to Hynek (2011, p. 22), places are elementary spatial units in spatial analysis, identifiable by coordinates and with relations to other places in the frame of spatial interactions. They have material objects and functions and are the basic building blocks of nets. Mutual relative distance between places is important, as well as overcoming it. The resistance between places can also disappear, however, and contacts then become difficult. Gibas (2014, p. 249) summarises these arguments in saying that both Geography

and Social Anthropology have gradually accepted the idea that people inhabit places rather than spaces, because the latter are in the process of permanent reconstruction, performance, questioning and experiencing.

Meanwhile, DeCerteau (1984) thoroughly discusses everyday practices in urban space and admits that spatial practices in fact ‘secretly’ structure the determining conditions of social life. The intertwined paths give shape to spaces. In that respect, pedestrian movements form one of those “real systems whose existence in fact makes up the city” – they are not “localised”, it is rather that they are spatialised (DeCerteau, 1984, pp. 96–97). The operation of walking, wandering or “window shopping”, i.e. the activities of passers by, is transformed into points that draw a totalising and reversible line on the map. The trace left behind is substituted for the practise. (...) Space is a practised place (DeCerteau, 1984, p. 97).

Hynek et al. (2011, p. 51) discusses the spatiality concept, in a similar fashion to Siwek (2011, p. 57), and claims spatiality is the quality related to space, indicating the sufficiency of space for the localisation of objects and for human activities. It is very exciting to observe the absolute space of streets, buildings, gardens or parks pulsating with social processes which create the relativity of such space, i.e. its spatiality (Hynek et al., 2011, p. 61). The question of the smallest geographical spatiality should remain open as it is possible to start with the proper body, flat, etc. (Hynek, 2011, p.22).

Place incorporates the way an individual both looks at the world, understands and interprets it. Place is the concept which provides individuals with understanding and learning about their surroundings, about other people and himself/herself. The individual can learn and educate himself/herself through the place which s/he inhabits, and place is becoming imprinted in his/her imagery and experiences (Vávra, 2010, p. 473). Place matters and its importance is multifaceted (Castree, 2003, p. 181). Place is among the most complex of geographical ideas and according to Castree (2003, p. 5) it has three meanings in Human Geography: (i) a point on the Earth’s surface; (ii) the locus of individual and group identity; and (iii) the scale of everyday life. In comparison, Relph (1976, p. 45) claims that the human is not just an address in a register or a point on the map. The very identity is the basic characteristic of the individual, which emerges from his experience with places that influence him. The proper identity of a place is not only important but also the very identity linked to the place for each individual or group. Keith and Pile (1993) think cultural geographers consider place as something which forms an individual as well as group identity; place is directly reflected in the character of people. Massey (2005), however, thinks we should not be finding the roots of peoples’ identity, but rather their life routes. In this way, it is possible to know how these “local” identities were created following the ways people identified with several “non-local” influences. There are also the issues of institutionalisation and community construction (Brace et al., 2006) and placed identities, together with notions of sacredness and the private dimensions of faith.

Close relations and the familiarity which is part of the knowledge of concrete places, is contained in common and personal experiences with places. The relation is mutual and creates roots in places. Such familiarity is not only the detailed knowledge of place but also the sense of deep relation or (spiritual) care for this place (Relph, 1976, p. 37); see also, Tuan (1977), Vávra (2010), and for a more

recent study on religion and place, Hopkins et al. (2013) who focussed in particular on the role of place and the ‘co-production of religion and place’. The relation which lies in the intimate knowledge of the place is created through long-term experience with the place. This relation is created in time and it is the base of our embeddedness in the place: to have roots in the place means to have a secure point from where we can observe the world and go beyond it, and to have such a secure point means to be embedded in the place (Relph, 1976, p. 37).

### 2.3 Sacred spaces

Sacred space is that of archaic religious experience: it is continuously differentiated and replete with symbols, sacred centres and meaningful objects (Relph, 1976, p. 15) and it is very characteristic of pilgrimage places, for example. For the religious person, the experience of such space is primordial, equivalent perhaps to an experience of the founding of the world, and it follows that the making of sacred objects and sacred buildings (and in some cultures that includes virtually all buildings) is not a task to be undertaken lightly, but involves a profound and total commitment (Relph, 1976, p. 15). Nevertheless, there are also personal places existing, and sometimes they even exceed “public” places of faith. Some places have purely personal meanings – the house where the individual grew up, a room where the prayer takes place, etc. (for the importance of personal places, see Raglan, 1964; Relph, 1976; Smith, 2008; Novotný, 2018).

Sacred space represents a part of the Earth’s surface which is considered worthy to be revered by individuals or groups. Such spaces can be sharply delimited from the non-sacred or profane outside world. In some senses, sacred space does not exist, but it has the value of “sacredness” assigned to it, people establish its limits and characteristics related to their culture, experiences and aims (Park, 1994, p. 250). The sacred is nothing other than the construct of meanings which humanity objectifies as a power that is radically different from itself, and it projects itself on reality to escape the anxiety of being engulfed by chaos (Hervieu-Léger, 2000, p. 72).

An issue for the use of sacral spaces and the creation of more personal places is related to the meaning of so-called secularisation. The essence of the secularisation thesis lies in the precondition that modernisation processes (industrialisation, urbanisation, educational change processes, concepts of rationality, etc.) are automatically connected with a decrease of the meaning of religion (Nešpor, 2010, p. 17). Berger (1967) defines secularisation as the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols. The process and the proper term “secularisation” are discussed from many points of view (Bruce, 2002; Dobbelaere, 1993; Davie, 2002; Hervieu-Léger, 2000; Martin, 2005). The following circumstances are usually mentioned as ‘proof’: decreased participation in religious life (masses, religious feasts, confessions, etc.); the decrease of complex orthodox thoughts and practices; the reduced support for religious organisations, etc. (Václavík, 2010, p. 31).

Current defenders of the secularisation thesis are, for example, Steve Bruce (2002, 2003, 2011) or Karl Dobbelaere (1993, 1998, 2002), while other renowned authors are against the thesis: Dave Martin (2005), Grace Davie (1994, 2000, 2002) or Daniele Hervieu-Léger (1996, 2000). The latter three authors describe various

forms of religious revival (re-sacralisation), such as the representations of variable non-church spirituality, or the new roles of churches in society. A relatively similar point of view is seen in the concept of post-secularism, originally introduced by Habermas (2006) and later developed also through the religious landscape concept, for example by Knippenberg (2005), Henkel (2014), Havlíček (2014) or Havlíček and Klingorová (2017), and also in Great Britain where it is related to ethical issues and social problems in the cities (Glasze and Schmitt, 2018). Religious landscape studies focused more concretely on churches in the United States are presented by Zelinsky (2001), studies of house churches in Singapore by Kong (2002), and for religious landscapes in Peru, see Olson in Hopkins et al. (2013). Different treatments of both agreement and criticism of post-secularism and post-secularity terms are reflected recently in the work by Glasze and Schmitt (2018).

Another related term, the privatisation of religious life, indicates the shift from Church religiosity towards a more individual (rather than collective) manner of living experiences, and it also can mean a shift to non-Church spaces (nature, home, individual mental abstraction, etc.), where religiosity can be realised. According to Bruce (2002, p. 20), the privatisation of religion generally causes the removal of social support: individuals do not proclaim themselves as members of a certain community. Such social support is fundamental to the strengthening of the faith and, if missing, then the maintenance of certain lifestyles (in accordance with determined Church rules) becomes very difficult. Šiler (2017, p. 125) notes a growing trend in the Czech environment: faith or spirituality moves towards the privacy of the home, intimacy, individual isolation; the Churches fail in their efforts of offering services in adequate highly personalised form, focused on the “user” (a potential believer). This is the reason why society seems to become secularised and seen to lose religion for many observers.

Yet another term – the “spiritual market or marketplace” – is often discussed (Davie, 2000; Nešpor, 2010; Václavík, 2010). It denotes that the religious systems cease to have sharp frontiers and become fuzzy idea systems, even in such a dogmatic system as Christianity through the interpretation of the main denominations (Václavík, 2010, p. 159). The city is a specific territory from the point of view of the religious market. According to Bartolini et al. (2017, p. 342), far from being the first place and foremost space where religion is expelled from modern social life, or exists in small islands, the city is rather a battlefield between good and evil. Modern cities also happily accommodate evangelical Christian movements, as well as the political Christian Right (Hackworth, 2012; Hackworth and Gullikson, 2013; Hackworth and Stein, 2012). The city becomes a kind of spiritual battlefield.

Tuan (1978) claims that the real meaning of the “sacred” goes beyond the boundary of a stereotype image of temples and shrines because, at an experiential level, the sacred phenomena are those which stand out from common places and routines. Rather, emphasis is placed on properties like remoteness, otherworldliness, orderliness and complexity, in defining what is sacred. “Otherworldliness” relates as well to issues of post-mortem spaces: similarly, Lužný and Nešpor (2010) or Park (1994) utilise the concepts of “other world” or “other averted world”, which do not consist just of the existence of a post-mortem space but are rather a whole realm or dimension or spaces ruled by evil creatures, which sometimes are designated as demons.

## 2.4 Post-mortem spaces: known and unknown worlds

In this section, I discuss two primary issues: a) the imagery of post-mortem spaces; and b) occult forces and practices connected with designated places. Religion has determined dogmatic bases which deal with the topic of the afterlife while, at the same time, the capacity of explaining difficult transcendental questions (the meaning of the death, etc.) can attract potential believers. The primary aim in this part of the study was to examine the imagery of current post-mortem spaces and the spaces of the so-called “other averted world” (of evil spirits). A secondary aim was to compare such imagery with Church dogma and, eventually, identify any differences or new trends in the frame of the imageries of young believers. This follows also the trend to re-install youth geographies since the 1990s, according to Hopkins (2007, p. 163) who claims voices about the lived experiences of young people are usually silenced, often unheard and frequently distorted. Equally, we should mention the studies on urban youth (Van Blerk and Horschelmann, 2011) or the religious transitions of young people into adulthood (Hopkins et al., 2015), which also use a qualitative research approach incorporating interviews and focus groups.

Faith in the afterlife is a central point for the Christian tradition. The death and after-death fate of humans has a central role in Christianity, which used to be characterised as the religion of salvation. Christian teaching promises the resurrection of the body and salvation of the soul for the believers. According to the believers, alternative spiritual worlds exist during our terrestrial life and it is possible to be in contact with these worlds. Some results also indicate the importance of places of occult practices (eventually inhabited by evil forces), and Christians are usually strongly afraid of these practices. The fear of alternative spiritual practices is based on the conviction that whole spiritual worlds exist, parallel to the material world, which is divided in good and evil (Lužný and Nešpor, 2008, p. 55). The so-called occult is calling to humans, and according to Dixon (2007, p. 719) it has never stopped ‘ringing’ on the exchanges between science and technology, urging a lineage of verification, empirical evidence, invention and proofs (see also Ronell, 1991).

Given the existence of the above-mentioned practices, instead of the question of who is winning the war between faith in God and faith in science, according to Bartolini et al. (2017), there is (at the very least) another question: how different occult, divine, otherworldly, superstitious, supernatural, paranormal and spiritual (etc.) ideas (from whatever source) continue to thrive and weave their ways through modernity. Indeed, for Partridge (2005), modern culture is in fact better described as occulture – which is readily witnessed in all popular cultural forms, from music to cinema, from literature to the visual arts (Bartolini et al., 2017, p. 346). As we continue into the twenty-first century, however, the authoritative status of science looks far from certain (Dixon 2007, p. 730). The occult exists in an epistemic ‘purgatory’ (Dixon 2007, p. 731), as a sublime presence of something beyond perception and beyond imagining, the contemplation of which unsettles our sense of what it is to be human (Dixon 2007, p. 731).

I believe that for these issues, the geographical aspects or rather fields of inquiry, to explore, as proposed by Park (1994) or Dixon (2007), deserve more attention. Thus, the above-mentioned reconstruction of attitudes towards death is reflected in this work in the sense of studying the imagery of post-mortem spaces and the geography of such spaces.

### 3. Methodology

The principal aim of this section is to present particular phases of the research project, including the pilot study in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Brno Lesná district, the field study in Přerov region in May of 2017, and generally the long-term research on the spatial imagery of young believers in Brno (2014–2017).

The research project in its final phase was transferred to the industrial city of Ústí nad Labem, to validate selected research strategies in another (post-) industrial city (similar to Přerov), and to continue also with the forthcoming research work there: see for example the study of sacral landscapes in Ústecký Region (Bobr and Novotný, 2018) and in both South Moravian and Ústecký Regions (Novotný et al., 2018).

#### 3.1 Grounded Theory

There was a “problem” in the beginning of this research inquiry with regard to the processes of inductive research (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Hendl, 2005; Disman, 2008), but later data were collected via participant observation procedures and semi-structured interviews (Kvale, 1996; Cloke et al., 2004), following Grounded Theory methods as described by Strauss and Corbin (1990), the authors who developed the original concepts of Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967). The final aim of such an inquiry is the formulation of new hypotheses, new understandings and the creation of theory (Disman, 2008, p. 286). If we simplify it, the structure of the selected Grounded Theory approach consists in:

1. collection of the data, aiming to establish the codes continuously, as the research continues;
2. coding the materials with the aim of creating the basic categories, i.e. variables that could constitute the future theory; and
3. construction of the theory as a set of statements about the relation between categories/variables.

These stages overlap in a mutual fashion and each is realised with respect to other stages (Švaříček and Šedová, 2007, p. 87).

Grounded Theory is inductively derived from the exploration of the relevant phenomena which are represented by the theory. Thus, the theory is revealed, created and provisionally verified by a systematic evaluation of the data about the explored phenomena and by analysis of these data. In this study, then, the “spaces and places of the faith” are examined, more precisely, their utilisation and perception by mostly young believers. This approach means that the field data and their continuing analysis and re-analysis and relevance to the emerging theory, are mutually complementary. We do not start with a theory which is verified a posteriori: we rather start with some ‘determined’ themes for the study and let the important facts emerge (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 14). Grounded Theory is like a proposal for how to seek some specific theory which concerns the delimited population, settings and/or time in a certain manner (Hendl, 2005, p. 243). When starting with the determined theme/field of study (“Spaces and places of faith in an allegedly highly secularised society”) and with the research problem (“Where and what are the spaces and places of faith of young believers in this period of so-called secularism?”), the aim was to evaluate religiosity in space from the point of view of the believers, i.e. to represent what the believers

think and how they perceive their surroundings in relation to the faith, where the believers gather, etc., with a focus on urban space (Brno, Přerov, and Ústí nad Labem).

#### 3.2 Current research processes

In summary, the present text is based on a four-year research project which started with a pilot ethnographic study, conducted between February and June 2014 in the Seventh Day Adventist (CASD) mission in Brno, Lesná district. After finishing the participant observations, relevant communication partners were selected and approached. The contacts were mainly provided by respondent-driven sampling (Cloke et al., 2004, p. 156), which can be realised with the help of a gatekeeper, the preliminary contact person with the researcher. The gatekeeper usually helps strongly with “opening the door” to a selected community, and the main advantage of this method is the opportunity to gain contact and recommendations to other people who are willing to speak openly or provide relevant information which is needed for the researcher.

In the period 2014–2016, semi-structured interviews with Brno members of the Adventist Church took place. The interview with the preacher provided the grounds for expressing the basic research issues, and the decision to concentrate on young believers (age 20–30 years) was made. One of the basic questions in the inquiry was why a young person decides to join the faith and how it is expressed in space. It also appeared to be useful to study not only members of CASD but to include young representatives of other Churches as well.

From June 2016, communication partners were selected from the specific category of persons in the approximate age group of 20–30, when – as was verified in the pilot study – a complicated spiritual seeking often takes place and eventually a solid decision for a certain religious/spiritual orientation is made. This age can also be crucial from the point of view of deciding future aims in life, e.g. starting a family, the birth of a child, beginning employment, building a career, the creation of a relatively permanent worldview and values, or an expression of one’s own religiosity, etc. In Brno, 12 men and 12 women in the age group 18–30 participated, 7 men and 5 women in Přerov, 2 men and 2 women in Ústí nad Labem and its surroundings. The average age of communication partners in our designated category of “young believers” (age 20–30) was 24.9 in the explored regions; in the case of all respondents from all regions the average age was 33.3.

The first phase of the original research was completed in September 2016, and after this date mainly older communication partners were approached to gain more opinions and to deepen the recent issues and to clarify new questions that had emerged from the previous inquiry. More recently in the Ústecký Region (since 2018), perceptions of the sacral and spiritual elements of the landscape were studied (Bobr and Novotný, 2018). As generally the case in long-term research projects, censuses and the commentaries of various authors (Heřmanová and Chromý, 2009; ČSÚ, 2014; and others), but also from the responses of selected communication partners, it was found that the Ústecký Region is one of the less religious regions in the Czech Republic. Research on religiosity in this region then offers tempting opportunities for future study.

In the frame of research on “spaces and places of the faith”, the main focus was on the Christians. With certain intentions (potentially opinions of opposition), members

of the Roman-Catholic Church, the most traditional and numerous Church in the country, were selected, versus members of Protestant or conservative Christian bodies, like the above-mentioned Adventist Church or other Protestant and evangelical Churches, which are opposed in a specific manner towards the Catholic Church (Novotný, 2018). The opinions of representatives of so-called alternative religiosities are discussed for comparison. Further research into the phenomenon of alternative religiosity is needed, thus it is rather marginal for this project.

## 4. Results and discussion

The results represent every-day and regular activities related to the faith. Spaces linked to these findings are presented in four main thematic groups (categories) which emerged from the inductive research using Grounded Theory: (i) spaces of everydayness; (ii) spaces of more evangelisation (broadening of the faith); (iii) personal places of faith; and (iv) imagined post-mortem spaces and spaces of the “other world” occult phenomena.

### 4.1 Spaces of everydayness and regular activities

Visits to church and other sacral spaces are only occasionally related to the everydayness of faith in the case of young believers: Everydayness lies rather in a close relation with God. This relation can consist of regular talk or permanent consciousness of God’s presence. Prayer is not necessarily an everyday issue. Equally, a visit to the church does not happen necessarily every week. In sum, there is a trend to deinstitutionalisation among young Czech believers, in comparison to older believers, who maintain regular or even everyday habits (church visits, participation in Church community life which is often linked with the importance of such a community for older believers, etc.).

Young believers tend to perceive a certain negative “supervision of the community” over an individual, generally in closer communities of believers in rural areas. The anonymity of the city is given preference and it is seen mainly in the case of students who moved to Brno from its surrounding rural regions. Eventually, such participants study and work in Brno while still living at home (in rather rural areas) and have the comparison between both modes of experiencing the faith in different settings. The most expressive example was the case of Bára (23), whose father serves as a deacon in a small municipality some 30 km from Brno, where Bára perceives the supervision of the community as very strong and restrictive.

An overwhelming proportion of believers consider mornings as crucial moments linked with the faith. Participants who do not like getting up in the morning postpone their daily time preferences dedicated to the faith to the evening hours (practically, always the favourite day time for the believers). The evening is proper for contemplation, and recapitulation of the previous day. Religious experience then necessarily differs from believers with preference for the morning: those persons perceive awakening as “a new life”, and they utilise the morning time to be “put in the mood” for the upcoming day, etc.

Most young believers were not able to define “habit or repeated activities”: they designate activities like prayer or visiting church/mission as natural or spontaneous, and not repeated or habit-creating because these terms (habit, repetition, etc.) are linked rather with negative perceptions. Older believers do not have a problem with these terms.

It seems that the faith does (or not) combine with work-life. It is possible to “not think of God all day” due to the surplus tasks of labour; however, then God could be even more recalled through “ordinary things” after work, it can be a blooming flower or a certain scene in the landscape (see the importance of time-space configuration, e.g. Catholic believer Soňa from Ústí nad Labem). Students without regular employment often talk with God during the entire day.

### 4.2 Spaces of evangelisation

Although young Catholics recognise several evangelisation events (i.e. events dedicated to spreading the faith), at the same time they consider communication between friends as the best approach to evangelisation. Young believers do not want to do ‘street evangelisation’, they even see it as very negative for the case of established Churches and movements (Hare Krishna disciples, the stalls of Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses), which are approaching potential believers in the street or public spaces. Older believers often feel frustration regarding the effectiveness of any evangelisation efforts.

The visibility of the faith in urban space is naturally perceived more by those Christians who seek spaces of the faith. The visibility of any Church was often linked with current Christian personalities (Pope Francis, or popular Czech clergymen like Tomáš Halík or Marek Orko Vácha), who influence (young) believers in specific spaces (church, mission, Biskupské High School in Brno) or in virtual space (transmissions of preaching via the Internet, even including mental abstractions created by the reading books of these authors). The possibility of a mass meeting with the Pope has a strong importance for young Catholics.

A large “trust” in God (close friendly relationship) – this is how a large part of the believers in this research described their faith attitude. Older believers even represent this attitude in such terms, i.e. they elicit the word “faith” and speak about “trust in God”. On the other hand, trust in local Church representatives used to be volatile: sometimes the priest was an unquestionable authority (often linked to the capacity for interesting and actual preaching), but at other times the believers did not have respect for the priest or preacher. This was particularly the case in municipalities where the priests were installed from a distant region or even a foreign state, usually from Poland. Polish priests working in the Czech Republic are usually perceived negatively by believers in this research project, mainly because of their incapacity to become accustomed to the local community or their lack in providing interesting preaching. An exception in this project was the perception of the Roman Catholic priest Jan Kornek (also born in Poland), who incited a religious resurgence in the Dub nad Moravou municipality near Přerov.

Believers in the Czech Churches, as well as representatives of current spiritual waves, rely on the willingness of individuals to approach the church/mission/meditation centre. This interest is intentionally stimulated by moderate forms of evangelisation, such as bill posting in urban space. With the aim of broadening the faith or spiritual learning, several courses/biblical classes/meditations/lectures are held. On the other hand, some current believers (e.g. the Seventh Day Adventists in Přerov) do not trust the effectiveness of posters and flyers and emphasise the importance of personal communication.

### 4.3 Personal places of faith

Although young believers typically speak about the omnipresence of God, at the same time they identify their own “places of faith”. These places are created in personal

space (their own room, bed, a specific place during a lonely walk in nature, etc.). These places can have a certain regularity on a daily or annual level. By the latter, we mean for example places of pilgrimage (see the often-mentioned Hostýn hill or, more precisely, personal perceptions of the importance of this commonly known Christian place), as well as the church in their native region linked to the Advent period or Easter feasts.

Personal places of faith can also be linked with everyday religious practice. Bed can become an “everyday place of resurrection”, where the prayer, destined mainly for the individual to be “put in the mood” for the upcoming day, takes place. Evening recapitulation is often linked with a personal place of the faith, as in the case of Czechoslovak Church member Jiří (46) (with his act of contemplating under the nocturnal sky), Klára (23) (a remote place in Ore Mountain, or a later similar place in Podkrkonoší Region), or simply the bed before sleep in the case of many young believers. This evening “putting in the calm” was called “meditation”, even by many Christians: it confirms the trend of an increasing fusion between Christian and “Eastern” imagery about the faith among young Christians. Places which incite religious experiences were accidentally found: forest chapels or crosses – see for example Jirka (23) and his experience in the forest of the St. Anthony chapel near Brno, crosses and God’s tortures in the landscape from the point of view of Jarin (originally from the Zlínský Region but who studied in Brno), or the pilgrimage place Skoky accidentally found in the chapel in Ore Mountain, both also mentioned by communication partner Soňa (36) from Ústí nad Labem.

It is not only the pilgrimages which are fatiguing to several degrees, journeys through the landscape have also their own religious meaning for the believers. Such journeys can serve for contemplation. The relation of believers towards pilgrimage places is problematical. These places are naturally linked only with Catholicism, while other Christian churches do not have pilgrimage places and the Catholic concept of pilgrimage place is sometimes even criticised by representatives of other churches. Older Catholics positively perceive pilgrimage places, mostly for their link with the traditional faith and with past generations of believers; however, young believers rather evaluate these places via experiences incited by the actual places. Pilgrimage places can be designated as too decorative, then criticised with a refusal to visit (often mentioned was the Vatican, sometimes Hostýn because of the souvenir stalls, etc.). Some Catholic churches are also rejected for any visits due to excessive decorativeness, even by proper Catholics (again mostly young ones). Although some young Catholics consider churches as their “places of faith”, these are not necessarily the most important ones.

Older believers are capable of interpreting very well their own “places of the faith”, and with much more detail than young believers usually do. This can be explained by long-term life experiences, long-time routine or regular repeating of favourite religious practices and habits.

The spiritual experience is specific and, at the same time, an important fact. According to the opinions of Christians and representatives of alternative spiritual currents, people usually feel or seek spirituality. “Seekers” dedicate themselves to experimentation with spiritual practices (or, worse, occult practices), and eventually they deepen their interest in such practices; sometimes the spiritual seeking is consulted with a priest who used to be perceived as a

spiritual authority, even by non-believing or seeking persons. In a broader context than the personal frame (e.g. a village community), the re-sacralisation can be triggered by the local priest (Dub nad Moravou).

Places can “influence” – they are “extraordinary”, they have “its spirit”, they cause “inner experience”. Experience means a certain transcendence, an immediate link of the individual with God. It is possible to reach the experience in a pilgrimage place, and the Christian tradition and history of the place can serve as added value, but in the same place and at the same time “the commercial side” linked with pilgrimage places is seen as problematical or disturbing. The experience can be given by the intersection of a specific time and space (e.g. in the words of female respondents Soňa and Klára, both from Ústí). Living the spiritual experience in a certain place, however, does not mean that the experience can be regularly repeated in the same place. These findings are in accordance with Tuan’s and Relph’s concepts of place, as well as with some of the above-mentioned other authors (Castree, 2003; Thrift, 2003; Vávra, 2010; Gibas, 2014).

Older believers perceive and honour places linked with tradition and the personalities of a given Church, while younger ones rather intuitively seek personal places, although this does not mean that older believers do not have long-term personal places of their faith. In addition, places with “the tradition” are marginal for young believers because they evoke institutionalisation, which is seen as largely bad for young believers. Older believers do have personal places of faith and they are able to thoroughly discuss them due to their long-term experiences.

The so-called “spiritualists” also have personal ties to places, mostly in nature. Nevertheless, relations to buildings (also often related to nature) exist too: “places can influence”, e.g. Hostýn. Sometimes a determined place means home (homeland), at other times it represents seeking and finding places of calm related to the experience of nature.

#### **4.4 Post-mortem spaces and the “averted other world”**

Post-mortem spaces are imagined by practically every believer in this research. Women usually think much more deeply about the afterlife and are often inclined to an explanation through the concept of reincarnation. This concept in the present is often acceptable even for many young Catholics, or, more precisely, several young Catholics participating in this research considered reincarnation as the best explanation of the afterlife, but this is totally opposite to Catholic Church dogma. Older believers, both men and women, do not identify themselves with reincarnation, nor with other “Eastern practices”.

If the believers imagine the afterlife as Heaven, this idea brings them feelings of calm and “hope” (this word was mentioned by representatives of various Churches), but the imagery of Heaven differs considerably. Young women (aged 20–30) often consider Heaven as a certain “waiting room”, a temporary space from where the soul can return to Earth. At other times, Heaven is imagined as a space ‘identical’ to terrestrial life, but where violence, pain or other sufferings do not exist, and eventually it is a space of gathering with close persons. Men usually do not have a specific idea of Heaven, considering such ideas as practically unrealisable for human beings, and usually do not think deeply about this issue. Male participants in this research commonly suppose that Heaven is a perfect absolute space and, in comparison to women, do not speculate about its concrete semblance.

Hell, if respondents believed at all in its existence, is mostly imagined as a (painful) state of mind. It can consist of a permanent mental sequence of the worst life-facts: negative actions caused by the individual in their previous life. Believers are absolutely convinced about the existence of a parallel “second averted world”: it is in total agreement with the afore-mentioned literature (Lužný and Nešpor, 2008, etc.). This second world is driven by Satan, whose manifestations are relatively clearly identifiable in everyday life for many believers. They document it in several cases from their own lives or in many overheard stories and experiences of close persons. Certain spaces and places of occult practices are perceived very negatively by believers (e.g. pagan sacrifice places, witchcraft shops or spaces of Satanist rites), and often these places are considered outside the protection of God.

The themes of the imagery of post-mortem spaces and the related afterlife appeared to develop very strongly in the frame of the research interviews and could be potentially fruitful from a geographical point of view. Moreover, Geography has not studied this issue in much detail up to now, although the theme contains considerable spatial aspects.

## 5. Conclusions

The research on spaces and places of Czech believers is closed for now: the planned phase of the research has been concluded. Hendl (2005, p. 243) claims that Grounded Theory is a set of suggestions to seek specific theory which concerns the delimited population in certain ways, in different settings and/or time periods. In our case, the chosen way was inductive qualitative research and the population consisted of believers in selected locations, offering comparisons between a larger urban complex with a relatively colourful religious scene (Brno) and (post-) industrial cities and their surroundings, where religiosity has been very low for a long time, mainly in the core areas (Přerov, Ústí nad Labem). Young believers in Brno with an approximate age between 20 and 30 years, were the original group subject to inquiry. In Přerov older believers formed the core group, while in Ústí nad Labem older ones also formed the majority. In the later phase (2017–2018), representation of the age group was not achieved in a practical sense, nor the locality of the research given the representation of the research problem. The settings or environment of the research was first the urban space of Brno and its close surroundings, including respondents from relatively close districts with high religiosity within the Czech Republic (Břeclav, Kroměříž, Zlín). There were however always strong ties to Brno, in keeping with the criterion of at least 5-year regular activity in the city. In subsequent stages, the urban space of Přerov and its rural surroundings was included, and in the last phase the urban space of Ústí nad Labem and its close neighbourhoods. The designated time period consisted of “the present”, which has been allegedly strongly affected by the secularisation phenomenon.

Our most important result was the documentation of a shift from public spaces to personal places of faith, mostly for younger believers, which represents a strong trend to de-institutionalisation and de-traditionalisation of the faith. Although older believers do not fit into this trend, they perceive this tendency in actions and activities in their close surroundings, including their own children and relatives in the designated age group. The faith is spatialised: equally, as the space of the faith, the faith is created, it is

happening, it is constructed and reconstructed. Grounded Theory is represented here by a new look at the so-called secularisation process, which in the context of current Czech believers (mainly younger ones) means a long-term, not only physical but equally mental, shift in preference for the geographical spaces and places which were utilised by Czech believers for decades.

This shift manifests itself in many ways and four main pathways correspond to the categories revealed by this research. Church communities and the gathering of believers take place in the everyday or, more precisely, on a regular basis, in concordance with the concepts of space, spatiality and everyday rhythms (DeCerteau, 1984; Lefebvre, 1991; Hynek, 2011). With respect to the evangelisation spaces, it is possible to capture a decreasing interest of young believers in the evangelisation in public spaces, and again it is rather a shift into privacy, towards personal places and to seclusion. The above-mentioned trend manifests itself also in this issue. As well, there has been an increase in the refusal of evangelical activities of other Churches in the public space: this is recognisable again more for young believers. Older Church members rather comment on their frustration from long-term relatively unsuccessful evangelisation. They usually do not comment on the evangelical activities of other groups, but they are able (if asked) to offer an explanation why certain groups (Jehovah’s Witnesses, Buddhists...) are successful in gaining new members. The older believers often prefer “personal ways” of evangelisation rather than manifestations in public spaces.

With respect to secularisation, it was the principal thread of the research. With our long-term study of the spaces and places of faith, we present some evidence of secularisation in the Czech context, knowing that secularisation is an ambiguous term which, based on our years of study, we do not evaluate as the decrease of believers and religious manifestations but rather a shift from the more public to the more personal. It does not mean personal places would not exist before nor spaces of gathering would end to exist in the present. It means mostly a shift in the attitudes mainly of young believers, who are a key group for the future development of the Churches and eventually for the maintenance of Christianity in the Czech Republic, especially with respect to how they will influence and educate future generations of believers.

Post-mortem spaces represent a topic which was developed strongly during the research. I had started out with a rather personal interest in knowing how respondents might judge this issue, mostly those from Catholic surroundings: if the general and dogmatic ideas of Churches are valid also in their everyday realities, and how the respondents deal with the theme of death and the afterlife. Later, this issue gained a strong spatial aspect: post-mortem spaces were considerably imagined and regularly dealt with by communication partners (women rather than men). Other spaces were represented by the existence of otherworldly beings, the ghosts of deceased people, demons and other beings which can harm the individual. The places linked with these manifestations were discussed: places with “negative energy” (pagan sacrifice places, designated cemeteries, places of negative events like a murder or Satanist rites, for examples). In the case of post-mortem spaces, women in particular tend to disagree with Church dogma, and they often prefer the reincarnation concept and often incline to ideas of Eastern religions, eventually to the fusion of non-Christian esotericism with the ideas

of Christianity. The ideas of the Purgatory and Hell are basically marginalised, as the idea of Hell is often imagined as an unpleasant and even painful state of mind. Research results were compared with the literature about the theme (Tichý and Vávra, 2012; Nešporová, 2013; Bartolini et al., 2017). It appears to be beneficial for the future to continue researching this issue, which relates Geography to Psychology and includes, perhaps, a controversy linked with the uncovering of taboo topics.

In this work, the possibilities of a geographical study of current religiosity in Czech society were verified, and it was completed using inductive qualitative research. This text has aspired mainly for a better understanding of the construction and reconstruction of the spaces and places of faith of Czech believers.

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**Postscript**

*This article is published in its original version, as submitted. As such, it has not been subject to the author's corrections after review, as the author suddenly died during the editorial processing. Due to the originality of the research and results, however, the Editorial Board decided to publish the article. Gustav Novotný (1987–2019) was an Assistant Professor in the Department of Geography, J. E. Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem. He obtained master's degrees in Spanish Language and Literature (2012), and in Social Geography and Regional Development (2013) from Masaryk University in Brno, where he continued to study and successfully defend his PhD. thesis on "Faith spaces and places of Czech believers" (2018). Along with unrelenting interests in qualitative research of alternative religious movements, he was an excellent teacher in courses spreading across political and regional geography and theory of geography, and a great supervisor of bachelor and diploma theses. We will remember him as unpretentious, diligent colleague always open to cultivated discussion, a man of many interests, and a good friend of ours.*

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